

Lahdelma, Tuomo

Vapahtajaa etsimässä

Evankeliumit Endre Adyn lyriikan subtekstinä vuoteen 1908

(In search of the Saviour. The Gospels as Subtexts in
Endre Ady's Poetry until 1908)

Jyväskylä, Jyväskylän yliopisto 1986. pp. 299
(Jyväskylä Studies in the Arts 25)

Although one of the most influential of those Hungarian poets who brought international innovation into Hungarian poetry, Endre Ady has not received the attention he deserves from non-Hungarian scholars. Precisely because of its merits, the present book by a young Finnish literary scholar, once more raises the question: why? Lahdelma's dissertation originated in his research trips to Hungary (from 1977, mostly in Debrecen), and his topic was the Biblical elements in Ady's works. In the form of a dissertation (succesfully defended in May 1986 at Jyväskylä University) the author presents the first part of his material: an analysis of the Gospel elements of Ady's poetry until 1908, including, therefore, his second great volume of poetry *Vér és arany*. As we may deduce from some remarks in the book, Lahdelma actually collected the pertinent data from the entire poetry of Ady; the well known phenomenon of university dissertations, i.e. the limited amount of printed pages, made his book only a first volume in a possible series. It is also well known in university dissertations that only the "theoretical introductions" or first parts ever appear, and promised continuations will never be realized. We hope in this case that further publications will appear, because both from practical and theoretical point of view the present volume is very interesting indeed.

Lahdelma gives a very brief biography of Ady, stressing the importance of religion, Calvinism, the Holy Scriptures and especially of the Gospels in his life and work. It is a commonplace that Ady represented a typical case of the *poeta religiosus* (which does not mean he was always a true believer), using Biblical allusions and terminology, posing himself as one of the prophets, swinging from Mary to Veronica, feeling and expressing the sorrow of the resurrection, seeing the first World War in apocalyptic visions. This complex nature of Ady's Biblical world view makes it very difficult to find a good way of describing his poetry according to the Christian traditions. The Calvinist bishop Sándor Makkai (*Magyar fa sorsa. A vádlott Ady költészete*. Budapest, 1927) in an open debate with other Protestant priests who disregarded Ady, has stressed certain forms of ideological and personal affiliation in Ady's lifeworks. Among the books to analyse Ady's poetry, Gyula Földessy (in his various exegetic works), Richárd Szabó (*Ady Endre lírája*. Budapest, 1945), László Vatai (*Az Isten szörnyetege. Ady lírája*. Washington, 1963) or István Király have all paid close attention to religious or similar motifs, but from different points of view. It seems to me justified to single out the Bible, and even more radically the Gospels, among other religious background elements in Ady's work. In his theoretical introduction Lahdelma uses the term "subtext" for 'an already existing text reflected in a new one (p. 20, following K. Taranovsky's definition) and characterizes the Gospels as sub-texts for very many of Ady's poems. He made a distinction between transparent and opaque subtexts. In some cases the terms "influence" or "transfiguration", and "allusion" also appear. The careful introduction gives a theoretical description of these phenomena, followed by a brief account of the Gospel interpretations in 19th century European literature.

A short German orientation (at the beginning of the book, using the English label "Abstract"), and a six-page long Hungarian summary (at the end of the book) also make the book available to non-Finnish readers. An English summary, however, might be of even greater use, since the terminology of "subtextuality" is also in English. One might make various remarks from the point of view of modern literary theory. I think the term "subtext" in some cases is the same as what the Nitra school named as "prototext". Lahdelma is careful about using the term "intertextuality", which is very different in various French, Israeli and American books. For the Hungarian reader the more significant result of the book is its very clear and well founded analysis of Ady's poetry. The work is rich in detail and important in theory and we look forward to its continuation. Also a good Hungarian summary (e.g. a lengthy paper in Hungarian) would be very welcome.

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If All the World Were a Blackbird. Poems by Sándor Weöres

Translated by Alexander Fenton, Illustrated by Don Aldridge
Aberdeen, 1985, Aberdeen University Press, 104 pp.

Alexander Fenton took upon himself a near-impossible task when he set out to translate a volume of children's poems by Sándor Weöres. Weöres (pronounce *Voe-roesh*), as Professor G. F. Cushing puts it in his foreword, is Hungary's "most versatile poet", noted for his unparalleled technical excellence. His poetry has been translated into English by Edwin Morgan and others, but so far nobody has attempted to tackle his children's verse. Nobody, that is apart from Alexander Fenton, who confesses in his introduction to the present volume that (given Weöres' linguistic virtuosity) translating these poems seems "almost like an effort bordering on the ridiculous".

This self-effacing confession makes one ask why then did Fenton try his hand at these poems? In his own words he enjoyed them so much that he tried "to convey the delight his [Weöres's] poems have given one". From this I surmise that Mr. Fenton reads Hungarian. Yet he stands open to the charge of over-ambitiousness by his insistence to translate the *entire* book *Ha a világ rigó lenne*, instead of choosing the best (or most translatable) pieces. Some of Weöres' children's poems are indeed nursery rhymes – "atmospheric" phonetic and rhythmic games. These cannot be reproduced in English, or at least cannot be fully reproduced; but why does Alexander Fenton settle in most cases for much less, for a paraphrase of the "meaning" and a timid imitation of sound-patterns?

Some of these delightful children's poems have been enjoyed by generations of Hungarian schoolchildren and have become part of modern Hungarian folk-lore. It is disheartening to see therefore weak English versions. The translation of "Tekereg a szél", for example, fails to reproduce the freshness and rhythmic vigour of the original. "Runs the wind, all alone, / Wide world seeking / Taking to its heels, / You'll never find its trail" goes the last stanza of Fenton's rendering ("Széles világba / fut a szél magába, / Nyakába a lába / – Sosem érz nyomába"). In other cases an attempt is made to reproduce at least some of the sound effects of the Hungarian text, so "Haragosi" becomes the "Harwich man", while "Harap utca" from the jaunty "A Kutya-tár" (Doggy Store) is transformed into – "Downing Street" (p. 48). Whether "Luppylugs, the scoundrel" is the right equivalent of "Kutyafülű Aladár" is hard to tell; perhaps in Scotland it is. On the other hand, in the poem "Dancing with Joy" (Ugrótáncot jókedvemből. . .) not only the rhythm of the original is lost in the translation, but – because of the elimination of Hungarian and Transylvanian place-names – the poem loses its natural context and falls somewhat flat. It is not the same after all whether "The town-cannon

roars" or "*Vásárhelynél ágyú bömböl*". This is one instance where Fenton's method of translation looks unsatisfactory.

There are, however, poems in this collection where the Hungarian context is not particularly important and the English version sounds more convincing. Renderings of "*Vásár*" (Come to the Fair), "*Kezdődik az iskola*" (School Begins) and "*Sehallselát Dömötör*" (Hear Nought See Nought Simple John) convey the lightness and humour of the original and indicate the quality that could have been the result of a smaller, more judicious selection. While Don Aldridge cannot compete with Gyula Hincz's original illustrations, his illustrations (with references to Hungarian folk-lore) are pleasing and blend well with the rest of the book.

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**Volkstümliche Keramik aus Ungarn. Eine Ausstellung
des Ethnographischen Museums Budapest.**

Hetjens-Museum, Deutsches Keramikmuseum Düsseldorf 20. Januar bis 7. April 1985. —
Westfälisches Freilichtmuseum Detmold 5. Mai bis 29. September 1985. — Bayerisches
Nationalmuseum München 24. Oktober 1985 bis 12. Január 1986
München, 1985, Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, 165 S.

The frontispiece informs us that a travelling exhibition of Hungarian folk pottery spent about a year visiting German museums. The catalogue, probably the largest and best summary on Hungarian folk pottery in the German language, was issued in Munich. In fact both the exhibition and the book are "Hungarian" products, for Mrs. István is curator of ceramics at the Ethnographic Museum (*Néprajzi Múzeum*) Budapest.

As is usual with such catalogues, the book begins with an introduction and greetings from the three German museum directors, and then from Tamás Hoffmann, General Director of the Budapest ethnographic museum. Following this is a general introduction in four mini-chapters. It gives details about the Budapest museum's collection, and also on the history of folk pottery in Hungary. The actual catalogue begins on p.21, and describes 258 items, according to form, function and geographical distribution. Three-fifth of the material was arranged according to the pottery-making centres in historical Hungary — thus Transylvania and Romania are included. There are about 200 photographs (many in colour) in the book, and roughly two-third of the catalogue items are depicted. The other photographs show pottery-making and usage of the items. A good map, a carefully made list of place-names mentioned in the book (in four languages: Hungarian, German, Slovakian and Romanian), a very good form list of items (introduced by Mária Kresz, the long-serving curator of the collection and the grand old lady of Hungarian pottery research), and a bibliography (of 38 entries) are placed at the end of the book. Of course there are faults in the book: both the exhibition and the catalogue were made for the German public, yet this direction is not expressed in the selection and presentation of the material, nor in the bibliography. E. G. Mária Kresz's major works published in Hungarian are absent from the bibliography; on *Haban* (anabaptist) pottery are more important works omitted; etc.; and it would have been useful to refer also to the handbooks on Slovakian or Romanian folk pottery, even if they do not say more on Hungarian ceramics, in Romania, Czechoslovakia etc., rather than the quoted Hungarian books. It is relevant to point out that in general handbooks (also available in German, English etc.) on Hungarian folk art usually include a chapter on ceramics, with good illustrations. However, in this context it must be said that while there are many German language publications on Hungarian folk pottery, their English, French and Russian parallels are simply lacking.